

# POETRY, FICTION AND ART

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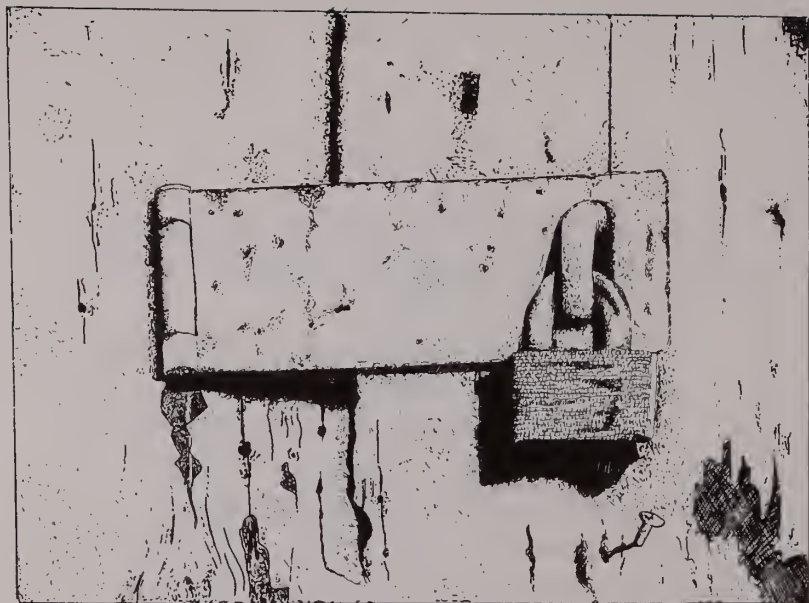
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Study of a Lock on Neutral Paper

*Pete Pelsinski*



## In the Backyard

---

I watch my father chop wood,  
the ax, bent close to the ground,  
Rests as if kneeling  
in the darkening light  
With a patience that can only come  
from somewhere else.

Perhaps it's the wind that loosens his hands  
tired as damp air  
as dark wood.  
And I lean against a tree.

He can't see me from where I stand  
or my eyes moved by  
Muscles I cannot control,  
or the clumsy hands  
Folded around the bark of a tree, and

I remember the time he left,  
And how home from Vietnam,  
Didn't tell jokes anymore  
But looked at the strangers  
and looked at the stars,  
and didn't make life anymore,  
Or even sense,  
but went to the backyard

To chop wood.

—Cathy Poulin



Friends

*Sacha Jotikalikorn*

# Rocky

---

During my eighth year, I began to follow Cecilia Rockingham home from school and mock her for the colored tights she wore. "Cecilia Red Legs." "Cecilia Blue Legs." I tracked her up and over the ten-foot cement wall that faced the alley running next to our school, behind the dense honeysuckle vines that grew at the tip-top, and through the woods that separated her street from the rowhouse neighborhood where I lived.

Cecilia Rockingham lived on Newton Road, which for some mysterious reason was never leveled to become part of the Village with its ugly red brick and feathery mimosa trees, impossible to climb and not famous for their shade. Newton Road divided the lower Village, which was where we lived, from the upper Village, which was where my mother wanted to live. The upper Village was not as uniformly Catholic. The kids in the lower Village sported fathers that wore white, sleeveless undershirts and cursed in Italian while they polished their cars in the alley. Some of the children I played with had nuns for sisters and priests for brothers who would visit with their families sometimes for the weekend. I shuddered to think of having a nun spend the night in my bedroom and was secretly glad that I wasn't Catholic, even though I was taunted for going to public school and the Methodist church.

But I didn't want to move to the upper Village like my mother. I wanted to live on Newton Road. During the summer months, I rode my bike up and down Newton Road two or three times a day. The houses were of the squat, cracker-box variety but impressed me deeply at eight years old due to their long backyards and stout, climbable trees that cast shadows over the pavement. Sometimes I would go there just to get off my bike and rest in the shade, when the sun in the lower Village was hot enough it could bake your brains. My backyard was precisely the length of a hopscotch court. I know because my father drew one on the cement one summer and we used discarded Cat's Paw heels from the shoemaker as markers when we played.

I followed Cecilia home for a week teasing her about those colored tights. The house that she lived in was painted a shade of green that was the exact color of the three bridges out at the Reservoir, which my father said were painted with leftover cans from the war effort. I wondered how Mr. Rockingham got ahold of this surplus to paint his house and trim. After Cecilia ran inside to escape my taunts and slammed the front door, I would stand in the street and spy into her backyard. There was a treehouse in the crook of an oak, and a shed with a cement mixer in front of it, and a blue corrugated metal swimming

pool nearly three feet deep at the back. I also noticed that the iron numbers next to the front door read 5-1-1-1, being the very opposite of my grandmother's address in Ohio, 1-1-1-5, which was my favorite place in the whole world.

On the seventh day of following Cecilia home, there was a woman in the front yard waiting for me. She was a taller replica of Cecilia, the same bulging blue eyes, the exact knife of a nose neatly boxed at the tip, and the identical black hair flipped up at the collar as if starched into place. While Cecilia sobbed on the front porch, her mother pointed a finger in my face and told me that I should feel ashamed of myself for picking on Cecilia who, after all, had never done anything to me, vicious or otherwise. I was scared and embarrassed and promised Mrs. Rockingham that I would never bother Cecilia again. "I don't know why I'm doing it," I told Mrs. Rockingham when she asked for a motive.

So I began to watch Cecilia all of the time at school, trying to decide why I followed her home for a week and maybe even more if she hadn't told her mother. Cecilia Rockingham, with those buggy blue eyes, was the homeliest girl in the third grade. Her bangs were cut too short and beneath the fringe loomed an immense white forehead. However, Cecilia was a genius. When we took our Iowa tests, she cried because we got to chart a graph of our scores in the different subjects, connecting the dots with ruler lines, and hers didn't go up and down like everyone else's. Her line went straight across, all ninety-nines, which meant that ninety-nine percent of all the rest of us, not just in our state, but in the whole country, were not as smart as Cecilia Rockingham. She never wrote in cursive, but always printed, and our teacher called her a living, breathing typewriter because each letter was so perfect on the page. And she was neat as a pin, as if trying to make up for the buggy blue eyes. All of her clothes had creases ironed in and her black hair that flipped up at the collar was so shiny that she had a halo when we were in the auditorium and she was at the podium narrating yet another play.

In the spring, Cecilia won the school spelling bee. It was either she or I that was going to win it and I went out on my first word, "absence", which I still have to think about when spelling it now. Lots of kids expected me to win and when I missed my first word, half the audience gasped and turned to stare at my mom, who was a popular field trip mother because she was so pretty. I took the long way home that night, figuring to sit up on the wall for a while, eating honeysuckle and mourning my defeat. There was a space behind the vines where you could sit and think and nobody could see you from the alley ten feet below. While I was sitting up there, Cecilia Rockingham walked by with her bookbag stashed under her arm. She had the spelling bee medal pinned to her jacket. I called down to her, "Hey, Cecilia, come up here. Let me see your medal." She hesitated to determine whether I was serious or if I was going to say anything about the color of her tights. Then she walked back to the lower

section of the wall, flung her bookbag over, and hoisted herself up. I was surprised that she did it so effortlessly.

So we sat up on the wall and bit the ends from the frail golden cups of the honeysuckle and slurped down the drops of nectar clinging to the slender thread inside the blossom. Cecilia told me that she had grapes in her backyard that tasted even better than honeysuckle. She said, "Tomorrow night after school, you can come to my house and play if you want to." And for some reason, I said, "Okay, Rocky." It sounded better than Cecilia and had something to do with how well she hoisted herself up on the wall. I already knew that she was smart, but now I saw that she wasn't a sissy either.

I was accustomed to playing with the roughneck boys in my alley. We didn't have much grass in the lower Village, so we played knee-scabbing games like tackle football in the street. There were one or two girls on my block, but they never left their porches and the stately tea parties they held for their Thumbelinas. Once in awhile, our quarterback would throw an errant pass that rifled through the tea party, scattering plastic cups and dishes to the accompaniment of outraged, yet at the same time, delighted, squeals. The girls embarrassed me. Even though I was a girl, I was good at sports, better than most of the boys, and in fact, never cried or told on people, attributes which made up for the improper gender. I also nurtured a secret sense of self-worth and composure that the other children my age could not fathom and which set me apart. This stemmed from a feeling that living in the lower Village was just temporary for me. My dad was an architect, a professional, a white-collar professional, as my mother like to stress. We ate dinner at 7:00, not supper at 4:00 like the kids whose fathers worked in the shipyard. My mom and dad used big words, played Scrabble, and had a bookshelf in the living room. Reading books and playing football were my two passions. The reading of books was a private passion, one that enabled me to escape the confines of the lower Village in a way not unlike the riding of my bike to Newton Road in the summer. Books, in revealing other peoples' lives, stirred me to wonder what was beyond this red brick city and filled me with longings. The longings ultimately made my alley boy relationships, which consisted largely of the discussion of football pass routes and the perfecting of belches, unsatisfactory. It was only natural that Rocky became a far better companion than these rude boys, who were so good at games but dense at more important things like telling secrets, making jokes, collecting leaves, and trading Trixie Belden mysteries.

Not a day passed that I didn't go to Rocky's house on Newton Road until I was thirteen or so and there arrived an impulse for certain times of private brooding. The nickname that I gave her at eight seemed to transform Cecilia until the girl in the colored tights ceased to exist in our minds. She demanded that even her parents refer to her as Rocky and they complied as if it were her given Christian name. I virtually lived at Rocky's house during the summer



months and spent the weekends there during the school calendar. We ate grapes down at the arbor behind the swimming pool, slipping off and spitting out the bitter skins to get at the sweet, green pulp inside. We made whirlpools in the blue metal wader, running around and around the perimeter until the water raged in one direction, carrying us screaming along with the current. Her father bought us two ducklings, which we named Dickie and Napoleon. They grew taller than our waists and ate one loaf of bread apiece each day. Mr. Rockingham decided that they were too expensive to keep and made us take them to the pet store. Crying, we tied strings around their necks and walked them down Newton Road like they were dogs. We spent the night outside in an army tent and drank jugs of Kool-Aid and listened to the transistor radio. Rocky liked that song, "What's New, Pussycat." I thought at first that she liked it because it sounded so funny. That's why I loved it, for the way the singer said "you and your pussycat nose." But Rocky told me that she liked it because of the man who made the record. She said that the way his eyes turned down at the corners made her feel tingly when she watched him on television. I turned on his program after that to see what Rocky meant. Nothing happened to me. I just giggled again when he sang about the pussycat nose.

The best part of being at Rocky's house was that there were no rules. Her father was almost completely deaf. He worked at a dry cleaner's and took spots out of dirty garments. We went to his work once and saw that he was sequestered at the rear of the store, going over a pair of pants and mumbling to himself. I think that he was a genius, too, just like Rocky, and was tossing about brilliant ideas inside his head while he scrubbed other people's clothes at the laundry. Mrs. Rockingham had to work because Rocky's dad didn't make very much money at the cleaner's. She was a cashier at Benny's Drugstore on the night shift, where she rang up candy bars and paperback novels. She had to walk to work and always went down Newton Road to the highway at 4:30 with a chiffon scarf covering her hair. She looked tired most of the time; her buggy blue eyes had black rings around them. She wore thick oxfords with spongy soles that Rocky called her sensible shoes. Rocky's dad went to sleep at 6:00, shortly after her mother left for Benny's Drugstore, so we had the whole house to ourselves. Mrs. Rockingham didn't believe in the three squares like my Mom, who insisted on things like white milk and a green vegetable. We ate whatever we wanted at Rocky's, mostly frozen pizza, which we cut with scissors, and Steak-ums and Eskimo pies. Rocky's house was dark and it smelled sort of bad, like stale bacon cooked over a week before. Their sofa was covered in plastic and nobody ever sat on it. We stayed up as late as we wanted, even if it were a school night, and watched scary programs on TV, like the movie *Midnight Lace*. Sometimes Rocky's face seemed spooky, with those eyes and that big, white forehead bathed in the blue light the television set made. Once I wanted to go home, but I fought the feeling off and it disappeared com-

pletely when we went back into the kitchen to get some more cheese popcorn.

Rocky's dad loved Rocky more than anything else in the world. He found it impossible to stay in the toolshed more than ten minutes on a Saturday without emerging to watch us play in the backyard. He would stand and smile at Rocky, his big hands resting on the handle of a rake or shovel. When we were eight, she would smile back and wave. The toolshed with the cement mixer in front of it was Mr. Rockingham's special fiefdom. We were not allowed inside. It was there, at his workbench, that he cooked up new toys and diversions for Rocky's entertainment. One of the best he bestowed upon her was a wooden go-cart equipped with ball-bearing wheels he removed from an old supermarket cart. He painted her name on the back of the seat so that everyone knew it was Rocky when she flew down the hill at our elementary school. But he put it away in the toolshed for good when she had her first crash. I witnessed the accident. She lost control of the go-cart, it flipped over, and she slid twenty feet face down in the gravel beside the road. When she stood up with her arms stuck out like a scarecrow's, I saw that hundreds of little pebbles were imbedded in her arms and legs. Mr. Rockingham plucked the stones from her skin one by one in the kitchen and then put a tiny dab of methiolate in each impression.

Many of Mr. Rockingham's projects, though well-intentioned, seemed to have disastrous consequences. Rocky told her mother once that she wished they had a basement. It was the sole feature my rowhouse boasted that hers did not. The very summer she mentioned it, her father began to dig one out with a shovel. Rocky and I called it the crypt. When the hole was big enough, he poured the concrete himself. On the first day we were allowed to play in the new cellar, after he constructed the narrow flight of stairs which led up to the kitchen, Rocky's hamster, Pierre, drowned. She had taken Pierre downstairs to show him the new basement. He ran out of the cage and scampered across the fresh cement to hide behind some boxes. We couldn't find Pierre for hours. When we were about to give up the search, she found him floating in the black water of the open cistern Mr. Rockingham had built in the corner. Rocky was hysterical. She screamed at her mother, "Daddy always does dumb things. Why didn't he put a cover over it?" Mr. Rockingham sat in the dark living room and blinked while Rocky stamped her feet and thrust the lifeless, wet Pierre in his face.

She ignored him for much of the remainder of the summer. That autumn, he raked the leaves by himself. In the winter, as if to placate Rocky, he built a mammoth sled run when we had our first good snowfall. After supper, when it was the coldest, he poured pitchers of water over the banked curves and dips, causing them to freeze. We whizzed down the slick ramps and sailed out clear to the bare grapevines at the rear of the yard. However, one of Rocky's neighbors tried to go down the run on a plastic tray. He flew off and broke his arm. The boy's father hollered at Rocky's dad for an hour in the backyard. Mr. Rock-

ingham wrung his hands and nodded. After the man left, he knocked the splendid creation down with a pick ax while Rocky stared gloomily out the kitchen window.

During the holidays of the same winter, Mr. Rockingham brought home the family Christmas tree and hauled it into the living room Rocky had seen a photograph of a Christmas tree that she liked in a women's magazine. She showed me the picture. The tree was nicely punctuated with tiny white bulbs and red ribbons. As a final touch, it was swaddled in shimmering strands of angel's hair at Benny's Drugstore. But when her dad set the tree up in the stand, it became immediately apparent that he had selected the scraggiest, scrawniest specimen on the lot. When the poor tree was decked with the angel's hair, it looked like a tree in a horror movie, a graveyard tree smothered in thick cobwebs. Rocky cried again. "Why did he pick that ugly tree? It's so embarrassing." Her mother tried to grab her arm as she ran back to the bedroom, but Rocky slipped away. "I can't wait to grow up and get away from this house," she screamed. After that, she was sullen and rude to her parents a great deal of the time. She mimicked her father's mumbling speech and poked fun at her mother's dull, sensible wardrobe within earshot. It was difficult for me to see how she hated it so on Newton Road. Her beautiful backyard was still there, with its lush trees and tasty grapes. Newton Road called to me, found ways to be enchanting, even as it pushed Rocky away.

One night, when we were fourteen, she pulled out a paperback novel from her drawer called *The Dancer*, which she said she had stolen from Benny's Drugstore. It was about a stripper and her boyfriend, who was a gangster. Rocky wanted to know if I would like to pretend that we were the characters in this book. So she was Rita, the stripper, and I was Tony, her boyfriend. She stuffed her training bra with sweat socks and I lay on top of her wearing Mr. Rockingham's trenchcoat. She sighed over and over again, "Oh Tony. I love you." We played this game for two months, always locking the bedroom door, then Rocky never mentioned it again and neither did I.

That same summer, we started going to Castle's, the public swimming pool up on the highway. Rocky stared at all of the boys in line at the diving board while combing her black hair, which was clear down to the middle of her back by then. Sometimes, it seemed that she had stopped listening to me when we talked, especially when we were at Castle's. She kept her eyes on the sleek boy bodies twirling and jackknifing through the air above the pool and answered "um hmm" to everything I brought up. I was amazed, too, that she always picked out the best-looking boy to stare at and pray for. I was nowhere near as homely as Rocky and I knew who was out of my league. Rocky had the nerve to ask boys from the Village Gang, who were the toughest and cutest boys on earth, to skate with her during Lady's Choice at the roller rink. They laughed



right in her face, which instead of being a deterrent, made her even more determined, it seemed. She'd go straight back the next week.

On the Fourth of July, we went to Castle's and, as customary, Rocky staked out a position next to the diving board. After we arranged our towels, two boys I had never seen before plopped down beside us. Rocky's head shot up for an appraisal. "One's cute, one's ugly," she whispered. "They're from Catholic school, no doubt," I muttered back. Then I rolled my eyes and told her that I was going to the snack bar to buy a hotdog. She warned me not to put onions on it.

By the time I got back, Rocky had invited the two boys to sit with us. Boys never brought their own towels to Castle's. The nicer-looking one, Tom, was sharing Rocky's towel. Malcolm was sitting on mine. Malcolm was short and pudgy; the most notable feature on his face was a soft, black down that covered his upper lip and made him look as if he desperately needed a washcloth. While Rocky, Tom, and I talked, Malcolm picked at the scabs on his knees. When the two boys went swimming, Rocky devised a plan. "We are going to ask them out," she said. The only problem with the eventual enactment of the plan was that Tom said no and Malcolm said yes.

So I had my first date. Malcolm was sixteen. He picked me up in a black car that looked like the Batmobile and we went to the movies. I wasn't used to carrying a purse and I left it in the theatre. Malcolm was a gentleman so he went back inside to get it while I waited in the Batmobile. He had to walk past the entire line waiting for the 9:30 show with a leopard-spot clutch bag in his hand. On the way home, he asked if I wanted to go to Lake Montebello and park. I told him that my father wanted me home by 10:30 on the dot. When I closed the front door and leaned back against it in relief, I let out a scream. "I'm going to kill Rocky."

She called me early the next morning for details. "It was gruesome," I said. She wanted to know whether we had made out. "Of course not," I answered. Then she said, "If Tom had wanted to go out with me, I would have done it. I would have gone to Lake Montebello."

At Castle's Pool, there was also a blond girl from Catholic school name Shari Castiglio who was beautiful and subsequently popular. She never went swimming like a mere mortal. She stayed up at the dance pavilion and shuffled around the jukebox in her bikini, a cigarette in one hand. In August, we had one of those cool snaps where you wake up one morning and the humidity has been whisked away overnight as if by magic. The sky was dark blue and the wind rattled the treetops on Newton Road. Rocky and I went to Castle's that day. It was too cold to swim so we sat on the benches up at the dance pavilion. Shari Castiglio was the only other person there. She had a towel wrapped around her bare shoulders and was dancing by herself around and around the jukebox, as if in a trance. I couldn't help but notice how good she looked. Suddenly, Rocky

let out a fierce hiss between her teeth. "I wish I was Shari Castiglio," she said. I stared at her face and was startled to see that she had tears in the corners of her eyes. "It's just not fair," she whispered.

Over the following winter, during our last year before high school, Rocky and I began to slide apart. It was a subtle drifting away. We stopped calling one another every single day like when we were fourteen. I discovered that certain secrets were stockpiling in my head, secrets that in former times would have tumbled straightaway from my lips during our weekend slumber parties. And it seemed that Rocky shared my newfound reticence. There were spaces in our conversations, long cracks of silence that left me guessing, filling in the blanks. One of the last nights that I ever spent at her house, we were lying in bed, listening to the rain as it dribbled from the gutters. Just before we drifted off she murmured, "I want to get married."

"You do?"

"Yeah. Wouldn't it be fun to be married?" she yawned.

"What about it?" I asked.

"I want to be in a big brass bed with my husband somewhere far away from here and just talk, talk, talk. He'll hold me and we'll talk. Forever." And her breathing subsided into the slow, rhythmic pattern that meant she was asleep.

I thought about her statement for a long time that night, trying to picture myself in a big brass bed talking to a husband. The closest comparison I could come up with was climbing into my parents' bed when I was younger and had suffered a bad dream. I always crawled into my mother's side because she was soft and smelled good. To fall back asleep, I took a pinch of her nightgown between my thumb and forefinger and rubbed it together. On the other side of the bed, my dad had scratchy whiskers that he liked to rub on my face and he wore boxer shorts. That was how I imagined a husband in bed. As I stared at the ceiling in her room, I repeated Rocky's words to myself. "Talk, talk, talk, Forever." With a jolt, I realized that Rocky's parents never talked, not like my mom and dad. I had never seen them exchange words, not really. Her father mumbled to himself and her mother wandered aimlessly through their darkened rooms with eyes vacant and unfocused. For the first time, I saw that there was a terrible silence in the house. For the first time, I saw that this silence was the source of the gloom I once ascribed to half-eaten frozen dinners, scary movies, bad smells, and an absent mother. And I saw again the little Rocky thrusting a dead hamster in her father's face. For a second that night, I understood everything perfectly: his blinking, mumbling ineffectuality, Rocky's frustration and rage, and her mother's retreat into a stupor as dull and colorless as the dresses she wore.

Rocky and I moved farther apart and took new friends. For the longest time, during our freshman year of high school, she didn't call me and I didn't call her. One afternoon, my mother asked me to go to the shopping center for a gallon of

milk. As I walked into the dairy store, I saw the Village Gang in their black windbreakers up in front of Benny's drugstore. Rocky was standing in the center of their circle, laughing and waving a cigarette. I hurried inside so she wouldn't see me.

The following summer was the summer of love and for a while, anything seemed possible. Rocky called me once that season and invited me over to her house. She had just gotten back from a rock festival somewhere in New York. In some ways, she was the same Rocky; she had her bell-bottom jeans pressed and creased, which I had not seen before in this era of unprecedented slovenliness. We sat in the backyard and talked. When her father walked by lugging the garden hose, she took a puff from her Tareyton and said in a loud voice, "God, I hate him. He is so stupid." Mr. Rockingham, more deaf than ever, smiled at us fondly from across the yard. When I asked about her mother, she sniffed. "What a drudge. I'll never end up like her." I mentioned Dickie and Napoleon, our ducks, but she looked at me like she didn't understand what on earth I was babbling about.

In our junior year of high school, the wish Rocky once made at Castle's came true, as nearly true as possible. She acquired Jimmy Fantom, a handsome but terribly stupid Village Gang member who used to date Shari Castiglio during our swimming pool summer. He had stopped going to school when he was sixteen. Mr. Rockingham gave Rocky his old Volkswagen bus and she became the taxi service for Jimmy's whole delinquent crowd. Once in awhile, she and Fantom picked me up on the way to school in the morning. He would drop her off and take the bus for the the day. I chuckled to myself that he called her Rocky, too. He was too dumb to realize that it wasn't exactly romantic to go with a girl named Rocky. She behaved more like his mother, so maybe the name didn't make a difference. Jimmy Fantom was almost illiterate and Rocky accompanied him everywhere, dispensing advice and even writing out his checks. I saw a cancelled one on the floor of her bus and it was stencilled out in the same perfect typewriter print she had used in the third grade. Rocky and Jimmy got married right after she graduated from high school and they moved to New Orleans because Jimmy wanted to live where it was warm all of the time. Someone told me that she never comes home.

I am thirty-one now. My parents finally live in the upper Village, but are beginning to rumble about moving somewhere else again because the neighborhood had gone downhill. When I'm home on a visit, I take a run in the afternoon, a leisurely run that more often than not carries me down Newton Road. Rocky's house is painted yellow now and I see that her father has taken down the swimming pool and the treehouse. They were both there for a painfully long time, as if he expected Rocky to show up one day in a pair of her colored tights. Once I saw him in the frontyard in his undershirt, watering the pansies that rim the house. He was bent over queerly at the waist as if he might

have broken a hip. Mrs. Rockingham still works every night at the drugstore, which is no longer Benny's, but some sort of chain, like Rite-All. The last time I saw her, in fact, was Christmas day. I was running down the highway trying to work off my mom's afternoon turkey dinner and I spotted her walking towards me on her way to the drugstore. She had a chiffon scarf wrapped around her head and clear plastic galoshes over her sensible oxfords. I thought to stop and ask her about Rocky, but changed my mind at the last moment and put my head down as we passed.

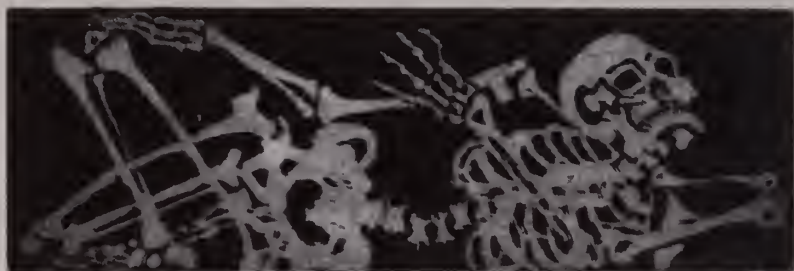
That night, I lay on my back beneath the Christmas tree. I stared up at the winking bulbs, half-listening to the chatter of my brothers and sisters as they sipped my mother's eggnog in the kitchen. I suddenly thought of Rocky's house on Newton Road, dark and silent in this season of lights and communion. Maybe I had not truly pardoned Rocky for the past as it stood between us. I was angry that she had left me, ended our childhood, moved far away, and attached all of her hopes for escape from Newton Road on a boy and not on her own brilliant, resourceful mind. As I lay thinking about it, my mother walked in and offered me some eggnog. I sat up and took the cup from her hands. For a second, as I looked at my mom's face. She smiled and bent to ruffle my hair. And I thought that perhaps the redemption of the past that we so restlessly seek in our memories lies within our capacity to forgive.

—*Andrea Potter*



Vanity

*Ruta Aidis*



The Final Trump

*Jennie Alm*

## Oh Sylvia

---

You wrote the words  
about axes. Hacking  
at a tree, unshaken,

the sounds still leap  
like snow rabbits poised  
on a ridge, a hieroglyph

of the white moon  
so elegant, like the red  
tulips you called "too excitable".

Your words were too perfect —  
they could not hold you  
sane against the thick void

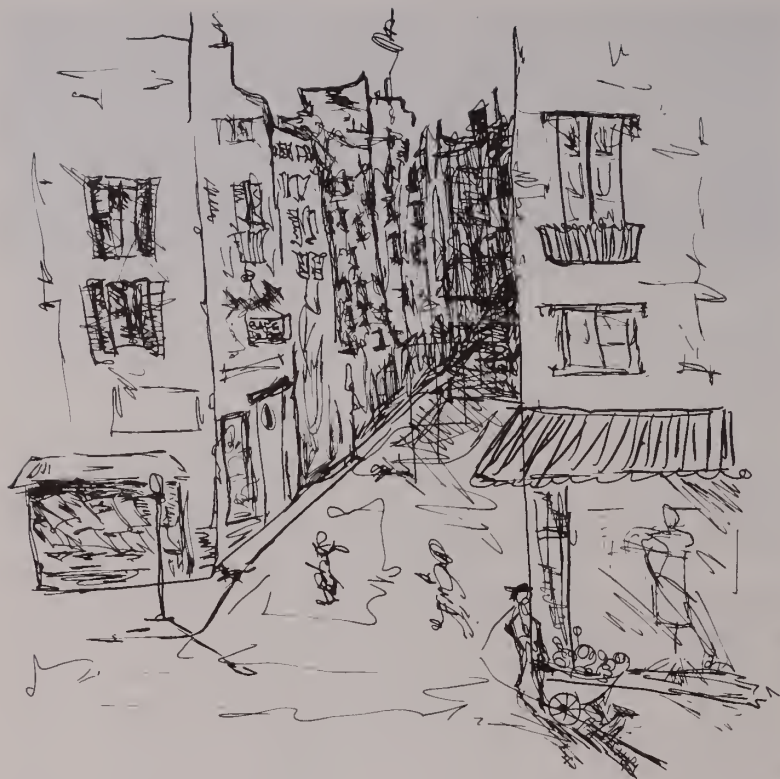
you edged around, the same  
dark mud that drags  
on my ankles. Sometimes

my ears can hear  
the voices that kept vigil  
around your bed, the noise

you babbled on and on about  
in the legend of words  
that could not save you.

—*Valerie Russell*





Somewhere in France

*Peggy Ramos*



# The Empty City

---

One evening in late August I returned home to find a cardboard box sitting in front of the door to my apartment. It contained nothing of importance — a few books, some records, a sweater. I stored them in my closet.

Not long after that, I found myself unable to sleep. Each night, I would return from my place of employment, eat a T.V. dinner, and then, if I were lucky, I could take a nap. An hour, maybe two. But after that I was wide awake, and nothing I did could bring sleep to my eyes. I would wait under the covers, looking at the ceiling, until dawn stabbed through the curtains.

I tried all the usual things: I washed handfuls of sleeping pills down with warm milk. I read enormous volumes of great literature, and I listened to Frank Sinatra on the radio. I bought a record of the sound of the ocean. I went to a doctor who tried hypnosis and taught me various relaxation techniques. But nothing helped. I could not sleep. After a while, I gave up trying.

By October of that year, I had become used to my insomnia, and I settled into a regular routine. After my nap, I would turn on the T.V. and watch late night programming until about 3:00 AM, when most of it ends. Then, I would wrap myself up in blankets and skulk about the apartment, working on little projects, until the sun came up. I solved ten-thousand-piece puzzles, I wrote to newspaper advice columnists, I sewed up the holes in my socks.

Winter arrived. I had to bundle up with more blankets as it got colder, because my landlord had a habit of pretending that the heating system was broken, in order to save on utilities. On particularly cold and snowy nights, I stayed in the kitchen and cooked up instant cakes and ready-to-bake cookies. I usually did not eat them, but the heat of the oven was a comfort.

In the spring, I came to the conclusion that my inability to sleep was due to some sort of deficiency in my life; I felt that something important was missing, but I didn't know exactly what. So, I decided to effect changes. I got a haircut, and started growing a beard. I wore different styles of clothing. I moved into the city. But my life proceeded much as it had before, and sleep remained impossible.

My new apartment was on the fourteenth floor of a gleaming residential complex. Living downtown was expensive, but I was able to afford it, having little else to spend my money on. The city was crowded during the day, but at night it was surprisingly empty. It seemed that everyone came to work in the city by day, and went home to the suburbs at night. My whole apartment building seemed to have only half a dozen residents. I sometimes wondered if all of the

skyscrapers were even real buildings. I imagined them to be great hulking machines, quietly performing some unknown task.

On the warm evenings of summer, I took to strolling through the empty streets. I felt quite comfortable, alone with the huge gray slabs of concrete and the quietly winking neon signs. But I soon realized that I wasn't completely alone. There were others like me in the empty city. I saw them in alleyways and on street corners. Some sat alone in all-night coffee shops. A few sat on benches in bus terminals. But most of them sat alone at the windows of darkened rooms, ducking out of sight when I happened to gaze in their direction.

I saw them often, but never spoke to them. We all knew there was nothing to say. When I did look into their eyes, I could see they were all waiting for something. As I was.

The summer slowly passed. One night, my wanderings took me to an old warehouse. I went in, and was met with a voice:

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm sorry," I replied, "I thought this place was empty."

"You didn't answer the question."

"Um. . . I'm looking for something."

"What?"

"I'm not sure."

"Is it something you lost?"

"Something I never really had."

"Then how do you know you want it?"

I gave no answer.

"Well," said the voice in the darkness, "I hope you find it."

"So do I," I said, as I turned and left.

One evening it rained, and I managed to sleep for over three hours. And I had this dream:

I was seated at a table in a very expensive restaurant. There were no menus. The waiter brought me a thick, juicy steak. I took up knife and fork, and sliced off a large bite. I chewed slowly. It was the most succulent and delicious taste I could imagine. My heart leapt at the new flavor. I prepared to swallow. Then arms siezed me, hands gripped me by chin and forehead, and my mouth was forced open. Large metal tongs were brought forth. The bite of meat was removed and discarded. I watched helplessly as my steak was served to another man. Then I was lifted from my chair, and thrown out into the street.

The quality of my work began to slip. The boss took notice, and spoke to me about it.

"I don't want to be hard on you. You've been such a good employee for so long."

I nodded in agreement.

"But you must realize my position. If the work is done poorly, I have to answer for it."

I nodded. He held up a small plastic part, the manufacture of which I was responsible for. It was called Part Number 37. It would eventually be used in the assembly of electric can openers.

"Now look at this 37," said my boss. I looked at it. It was misshapen and discolored. "We can't use a damaged part like this."

I nodded.

"A factory runs on teamwork. You know that. Yet your fellow workers say that you have been acting strangely towards them."

"I haven't been sleeping too well of late."

"I see. Well, I'm not going to give you an Official Reprimand this time, but see to it that your work improves."

"Yes sir." I turned to go.

"Have you tried sleeping pills?"

"Yes. They don't work. That's not what I need."

As fall enveloped the city, and the nights became nippy, I began to frequent a particular doughnut shop. I enjoyed its atmosphere. It was warm and bright inside, and the strong smell of doughnuts was intoxicating. For most of the night, a round woman named Beatrice ran the shop. I knew her name was Beatrice because she wore a little plastic badge engraved with the name Beatrice. She was perfect for the job. She had a smile permanently tattooed onto her face, and phrases like "have a nice day" and "thank you come again" rolled off her tongue without any apparent effort. When there were no customers requiring her attention, she would sit down behind the counter and read romance novels.

Around 4:00 AM, a friendly old man named Peter would emerge from the cold gray city and begin cooking the doughnuts for the coming day. He had the strange habit of whistling the theme music from various T.V. shows as he pounded the dough and cut it into doughnut shapes.

At about 6:00 AM, a quiet young woman named Sally came in to take over for Beatrice. Sally wore glasses, and long brown hair which she usually kept up in a bun. Every night for two weeks I sat waiting for her to arrive; when she did, I unobtrusively watched her every movement until almost 8:00 AM, when I had to go to the factory.

Then one morning, she spoke to me.

"What's your name?"

The sound of her voice made me jump. "William," I said. "What's yours?" "Sandra."

"Then how come it says Sally on your badge?"

"They didn't have any Sandra nametags so they gave me the closest thing they had."

"Oh."

"So what brings you into this place every night?"

"I can't sleep."

"Not at all?"

"Well, sometimes for an hour or two."

"Have you tried. . ."

"I've tried everything."

". . .bedtime stories?"

"Um. . .no."

"When I was a little girl and couldn't get to sleep, my mother read me bedtime stories. Worked every time."

She took a paper bag out from under the counter and wrote her phone number just above the words "Fresh Delicious Doughnuts". "Here. Call me up tonight, and I'll read you a bedtime story."

"Thank you."

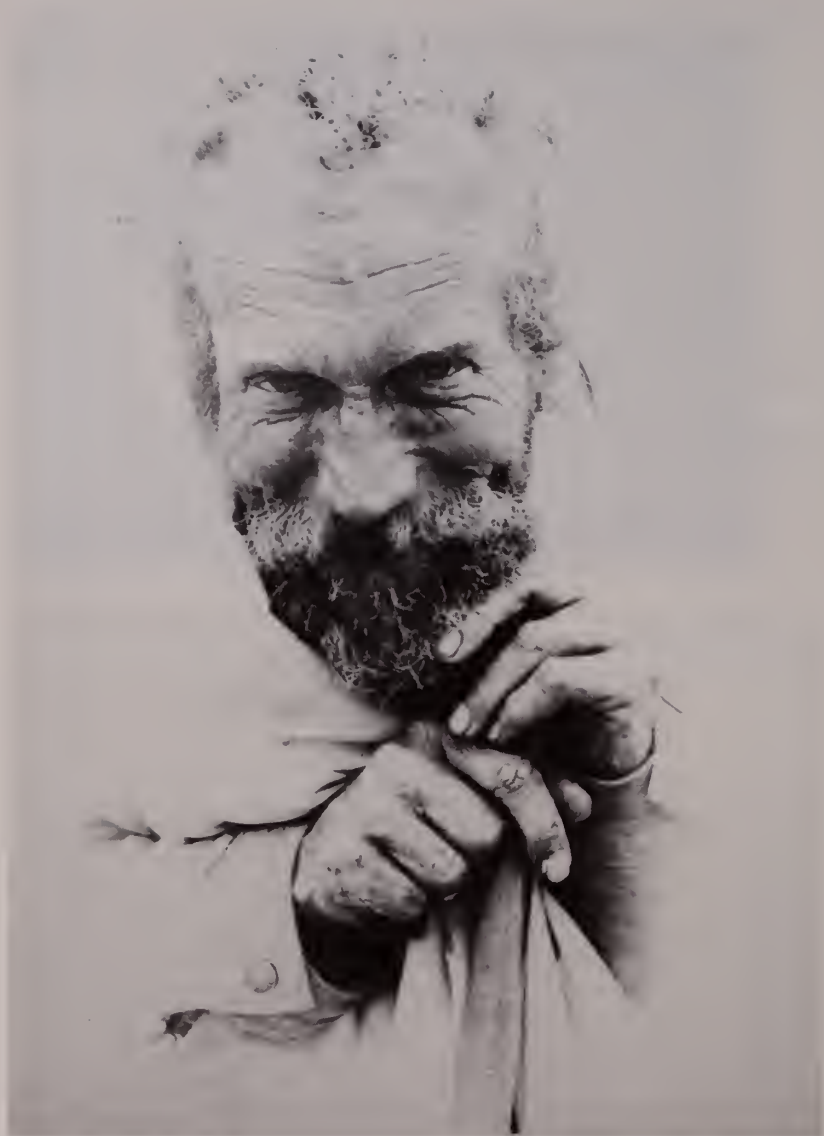
As I walked to the factory that morning, I found myself yawning.

*—Andrew Looney*



Mushrooms

*Sacha Jotikalikorn*



*Ruta Aidis*

I was sitting on a bench in Santa Monica putting film into my camera when towering over me he said, "I'm a Sex Maniac, I've fathered 14 children and I think that you're very attractive. . ."

I smiled, and asked him if I could take his picture

Click — and he was gone. . .

## For Malcolm, A Year Later

---

Compose for Red a proper verse;  
Adhere to foot and strict iamb;  
Control the burst of angry words  
Or they might boil and break the dam.  
Or they might boil and overflow  
And drench me, drown me, drive me mad.  
So swear no oath, so shed no tear,  
And sing no song blue Baptist sad.  
Evoke no image, stir no flame,  
And spin no yarn across the air.  
Make empty anglo tea lace words—  
Make them dead white and dry bone bare.

Compose a verse for Malcolm man,  
And make it rime and make it prim.  
The verse will die—as all men do—  
But not the memory of him!  
Death might come singing sweet like C,  
Or knocking like the old folk say,  
The moon and stars may pass away,  
But not the anger of that day.

—*Etheridge Knight*



*Carl Bower*



## The Walk

---

At four o'clock in the afternoon, Dana Lurier finally leaves her house to walk up to the Safeway. She has spent the whole day lying on the living room couch staring at the yellow and brown wallpaper, wanting the telephone to ring and dreading that it would ring. Now, wrapped up in her biggest coat, she watches her feet move across the frozen ground, avoiding the patches of ice. To the people in cars she wants to look like a brave, happy person, someone who takes this walk every day without hesitation. Finally she sees the shopping center ahead. As she stands on the street corner waiting for the light to change, a car passes by, and a man in the back seat leans out the window and yells, "BAAYBEEE!" Dana cringes. When the light changes, she runs across the street, across the parking lot, and into the Safeway.

The store is warm and not crowded. Dana walks straight to the shelves of canned soup and looks up and down the rows of cans. Pea soup? No, she got pea soup last time. Cream of asparagus, then, or clam chowder? She stands for several minutes, looking from one to the other. It would be much easier, she thinks, if people didn't have to eat, didn't have to decide what to eat. On the other hand, hunger was the thing that drove her out of the house today. She imagines herself lying on the couch, ignoring food, not turning on the lights as the house got dark. She grabs the clam chowder and walks to the front of the store. There are only two people in the express lane; she stands behind them, studying the shelves of candy by the check-out counter. Looking at the bags of M&M's gives her a craving for chocolate; she picks up a bag of M&M's and pays for it along with the soup, then goes back out into the cold. The door of the drugstore next door opens and out walks someone who looks just like Tom Foley—Tom, who said he might want to do something on Saturday. She is seeing him everywhere, molding every man she sees into Tom's tall, spindly form. This guy really looks like him, though. She starts to follow him across the parking lot, watching his black-haired head bob up and down with walking. Suddenly she recognizes the black and white scarf he is wearing. It is Tom! He was wearing that scarf the first time she met him; he told her that it was called a "kafia." That was almost a year ago, but it has only been recently in the last month or so, that she has begun to feel that she knows him.

She hesitates a moment now, watching his arms swinging at his sides, then runs up to him and puts her hands on his shoulders, shouting,

"Hey Tom!"

"Hi Dana," he says, spinning to face her. "I just tried to call you, but you weren't home."

"I've been around all day. You must have called right after I left."

"Just your luck, huh?" he taunts her. "You lie around all day by the phone, then as soon as you leave the house someone calls." Her mouth curls into a tiny smile as he reaches down to mess up her hair.

"I wasn't lying around. I had work to do. I have a test in my Shakespeare class on Monday."

"Such a diligent student you are. So you spent all Saturday studying, huh?" She bows her head a little and looks up at his laughing face. Who is this stranger I'm talking to? she thinks. So what if I was lying around all day? So what if I was studying? Is that so funny? Never mind. Tom is talking about music now.

"I got a new record today," he tells her. "The soundtrack to the film *Mishima*, by Philip Glass. Have you seen that movie?"

"No. I want to. I've heard the soundtrack. It's really good, don't you think?"

"Yeah. I'm going home to listen to it right now." He holds up the bag with the record in it. "I just bought it, see?"

"Hey Tom," she says. "Were you planning to do anything tonight?"

"I can't. I've got to go to work at 7:00."

"7:00 tonight?"

"Yeah. Isn't it the worst? They asked me on Thursday if I would, and since I'm new there and all, I sort of had to say yes. I've got to go back home now to eat something before work." He turns, about to leave. Now she will have to go back to her house, back to the living room couch.

"Tom?" He turns back around.

"Yeah?"

"I have a blank tape. Could I come over and tape *Mishima* right now? Would that be all right?"

"You have a blank tape? Do you always carry blank tapes around with you?"

"Well, no, but I bought it yesterday, and I forgot to take it out of my purse."

He shakes his head, laughing.

"It's okay. Come on over." They start to walk to his apartment, which is two blocks away. "Are you hungry?" he asks her. She remembers why she isn't still at home.

"I'm starving," she says.

"All right. I was just going to cook some potatoes, but you can have some if you want." He stomps along like a little boy on his way out to play in the snow. Dana walks beside him, not saying anything. Nothing comes to her head now that seems worth saying out loud.

She remains silent until they get to his apartment. He goes straight to the kitchen and gets out the potatoes. Dana gets the record out of its bag and looks at the cover. She goes into the kitchen, where Tom is cutting up the potatoes.

"Should I put this on?"

"Of course," He laughs. "Look at you, you're so tentative. Just do something sometime, without asking if it's all right."

"Okay," she says, looking at the floor, tracing the edge of a floor tile with her toe. She goes into the living room to put the record on and set up the tape. The music begins with the sound of bells. She lights a cigarette and leans back on the couch, listening. Tom comes out of the kitchen, brandishing a spatula.

"Stop monopolizing the conversation, will you, Dana?" He smiles. She sits up a little.

"Sometimes I'm just not very talkative."

"What, am I not entertaining enough for you? Just be a little bit more lively." He walks back into the kitchen. She can hear the crackling of frying potatoes and smell them cooking. The walls in Tom's living room are white, with no yellow and brown wallpaper to stare at, so she stares at a poster of a painting by Degas, a dancing class. One of the dancers is reaching around to scratch her back; she is immortalized as the dancer who scratches her back.

Dana gets up from the couch and goes to stand in the kitchen doorway. She watches Tom drain the fried potatoes. He isn't smiling now. He looks up at her.

"Want ketchup?"

"Yeah, sure," she says. Tom puts the potatoes on a plate, gets the ketchup out of the refrigerator, and walks into the living room. Dana follows him. They sit down on opposite sides of the couch, with the potatoes between them, and they start to eat in silence. Dana gets up to turn the record over.

"Days like today, when I spend the day alone, I start to feel like no one knows me and I can't talk to anyone."

"Hmm," he says, not looking at her.

"I mean I start to feel sort of separate. I know it's not true; I know I can talk to people, it's just the way I feel sometimes. Know what I mean?"

"I guess so." He gets up and walks into the kitchen. Dana picks up her tape case, gets a pen out of her purse, and starts to write the titles of songs on the tape case.

When the record ends, she takes it off the turntable and puts it away, then takes her tape out of the tape recorder and puts it in its case. She walks to the doorway of the kitchen.

"Tom, I think I'm going home now. I feel like studying."

"Okay," he says, then a moment later, "wait. I have to go to work in 15 minutes. Why don't I give you a ride?"

"No, thanks. It's not far, and I want to walk." She gets her coat from the arm of the couch and puts it on, then walks to the door, turning around to wave.

"Bye Tom!"

"Bye Dana," he says, from the kitchen doorway. She walks out the door into the clear air of the night. Her hands are in her pockets, her eyes on the ground, as she walks the two blocks back to the shopping center. She can still see an im-

age of Tom watching her from the kitchen doorway, watching her leave his apartment. Is he mad at her? Why would he be? It doesn't matter. She spent this whole day waiting, and now she isn't waiting for anything. When she turns up the street to her house, she starts to sing under her breath. Those potatoes weren't enough to eat; she is still hungry. When she gets home, she puts the soup on to heat, then puts the kettle on. Even a few hours out of the house can make you want to go home again and rest, she thinks. She goes into her living room and sits on her couch. She leans back and closes her eyes, relaxing for the first time today.

—*Meredith Meade*



Ying-Yang

*Peggy Ramos*



Hambrook's Snowworks

*Charles Cohen*

# Oranges

---

How did you know  
I like oranges?

Pa knew.

Long winter nights  
he'd peel  
the bright thick skin,  
long twisted spiral  
of orange  
then hand us segments  
    juicy envelopes  
    exploding between our teeth.

On Christmas  
he would put  
an orange  
in my stocking—

winter snow and oranges.

He'd hold my mittened hand  
in his warm pocket—  
we'd trot  
crunching icy sidewalks  
blowing gray smoky breath—

oranges were winter then.

—Lillian Frankel

## Crickets

---

Winter crosses crickets  
with temporary extinction.

Spring, here and there chirps  
sound deep from grasses.

Then an halleluiah choir,  
an august-september allegro

until the autumn aria,  
one withered cricket in the cellar.

—*Kevin Sterling*





*Robert Goldrick*

## Bike

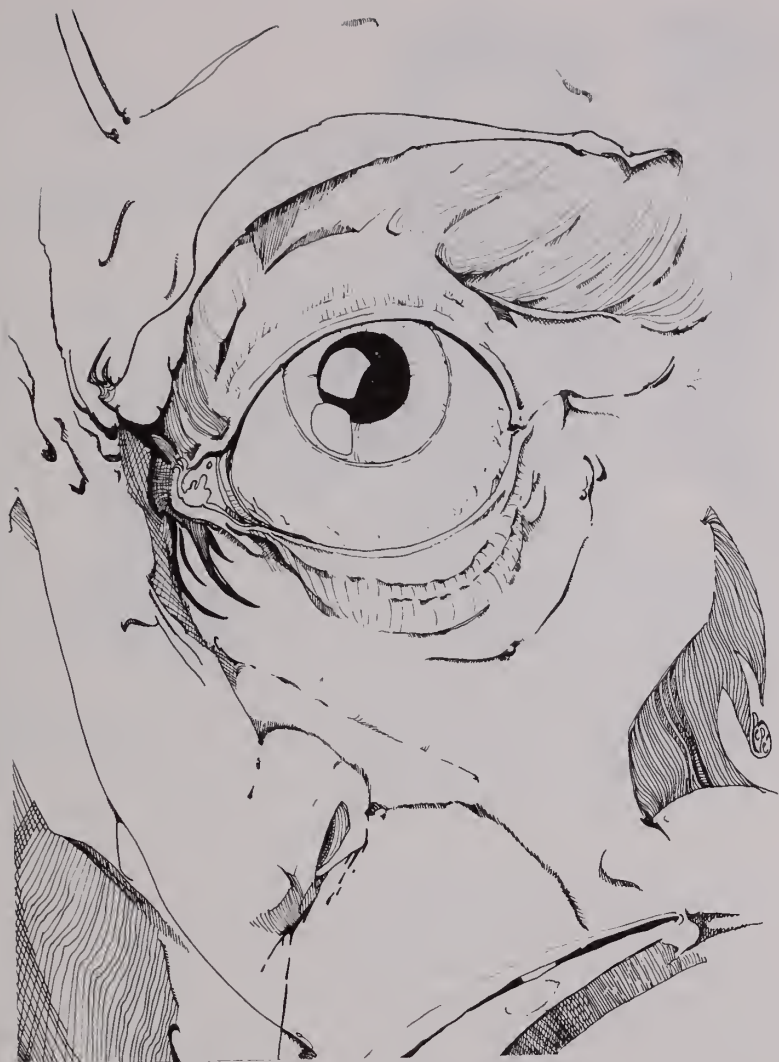
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I bought it for a dollar,  
that Edsel of a bike,  
its stripped blue frame  
the skeleton of some  
ice age bison, lurching  
toward extinction.

Its fat, may-pop white walls  
encircled spokes the thickness  
of pencils, and its blackened  
jaws of sprocket and chain  
gnawed my jeans an inch  
above the ankle.

The springs of its split leather  
seat were the size of hand  
grenades, and those wide,  
rusting handle bars gored  
just below the ribs in crash  
after Kamikaze crash.

—John O'Dell



Close-up

*José Acosta*



Annunciation

*Jennie Alm*

Sherri adjusts the rear-view mirror until she is in sight. She puts on lip-gloss and then moistens her fingertip with her tongue and wipes the flecks of mascara from beneath her eyes. Her eyes are large and dark. They are her very best feature, Sherri believes. Maybe she'll say nothing to him, nothing at all. She sees herself sitting at the farthest corner of the bar away from him. When he sees her she'll look straight into his eyes, but she won't say anything, not even hello. From then on he won't be able to stop looking at her. Later on, he'll try to talk with her, maybe as she leaves the bathroom or walks back from the pool-table room. But Sherri won't say a thing. And when she leaves the bar, he'll walk out behind her to the parking lot and plead with her to at least talk with him. Then he'll explain everything.

As she walks between the row of cars and cycles and the side wall of the building, she hears glass breaking and men shouting. Walking out in front of Nick & Fred's she sees the crowd gathered in the A&P parking lot across the street. It can't be a big fight. Most of the men are standing around or leaning against cars drinking beer and just watching. She walks up to the curb and under the streetlight sees a few men striding about, shouting sometimes, moving close to, then away from the two men fighting. One man's back presses up against and slides down the side of a van, his hands holding the arms, his head limp upon the shoulder of the man who is close in, head and shoulders bowed, slow punching him in the stomach.

A woman walks out from behind a group of men and starts toward Nick & Fred's. She's wearing cut-off jeans cut high up her thighs, a tube-top, spike heels. A few men follow her. Sherri recognizes Melissa, a dancer from the Starlight Lounge on Route 1. Fights happen when she's around. The man against the side of the van slides to the ground as the other man sees Melissa leave and steps away from him. It's Johnnie. Sherri is surprised. He's a pretty boy, doesn't like to fight, doesn't want his face hurt. He kicks the man on the ground once or twice and then runs after Melissa.

Sherri starts to follow them into the bar, but when she gets to the door she stops, backs away, and digs through her purse for her hairbrush. She brushes her hair, throws its weight over her shoulders, and, then, after adjusting her halter-top, goes inside.

Halfway down the side of the U-shaped bar, Bill sits with a woman that Sherri has seen before but doesn't know. Sherri, her chin high, walks slowly past the empty stools lining her way and sits down next to him. The woman

glances at her, tightens her mouth, and leans toward Bill to whisper something in his ear.

Sherri looks straight ahead and waits for him to turn to her, but he doesn't. She glances quickly at him. He won't look at her. He is rubbing the woman's thigh with one hand, drinking his beer with the other, looking everywhere else but at Sherri. The puffy little feet of his cupid tattoo dangle below the edge of his black T-shirt's sleeve. Hidden beneath the sleeve are the cupid's round blue eyes, golden curls, the tiny bow of its red mouth, the white wings which stretch across his skin when his muscles move beneath.

Sherri studies her long red nails, motions for the waitress tending the bar, frowns when the waitress doesn't see her. She looks around for Nick, the bartender-owner, and sees him standing very still, right outside the bar, watching Melissa. Johnnie, leaning against the bar, waiting for her return, is watching too, his handsome face confused, blunted. Melissa stands before the entrance of the pool-table room, straddling the light from behind her in the triangle of her parted legs, her form haloed, her face in shadow, unsnapping, resnapping, unsnapping with a click, click, click, the metal snap above the zipper of her cut-offs. Nick and the other men now gathering before her must be hoping for a free show, Sherri realizes. She might never get a drink and she needs one badly. Even the waitress is watching.

Finally Johnnie gets up and goes to Melissa and reaches for her hand. She pushes his hand away, saying loudly, "Don't touch me," and then strides toward the bar, resnapping her jeans as she walks. Johnnie follow her, saying, "Oh baby, don't be mad, whadda you so mad about, huh? What I do? What I do?"

"He was going to give me a ride back," she says, and Sherri figures that she must be talking about the guy that Johnnie fought.

"But you said you didn't want to go with him," Johnnie says, "You told me you didn't want to go with him and he was trying to make you go with him."

"I want to go with him and now he's gone," Melissa says, walking toward the door. Johnnie follows her. "Com'on, baby, please, I'll take you, I'll take you," Sherri hears as he walks out the door behind her. Johnnie's not used to losing.

Nick returns and notices her, and she orders a beer and a shot of peppermint schnapps. Sherri looks quickly at Bill. He has to look at her now, she thinks, now that she has spoken. And he does look over, but immediately looks away. Sherri drinks down her shot, the schnapps hot and sweet, and sips her beer. When she starts clicking her nails against the side of the bottle, the woman with Bill announces that she has to go to the bathroom. Bill watches her go. Sherri touches his arm lightly. He looks at her. She smiles and leaves her hand upon his forearm.

"How ya doing?"

"Alright," he says and removes her hand.



She smiles patiently. "What's alright?"

"What do you think?" He shakes his head, looking away from her. "Alright is alright."

"Not good? Just alright?"

"Things are great."

"You never did talk too much," she says, her voice softer, her smile more patient, as she puts her hand upon his forearm and scratches his skin lightly with her nails.

"Never had much to say to you."

Sherri removes her hand and reaches for her beer. She sips and sips. She runs her hand through her hair, lifts her chin high. Her eyes are very wide. Not turning her head, not looking at him, she says, "Seems like you had a lot to do with me, even if you never had nothing to say to me."

"We fucked around," he says, looking around, lowering his voice as if it had ever been a secret in Nick & Fred's, "that's all, we fucked around some."

"Seems to me like it was a little bit more than that."

"Seem to you, seems to you, you always tried to make it more, and I told you no, didn't I? Didn't I always tell you no?"

When Sherri shakes her head, he frowns and whispers, "Oh, jeez, don't go crazy on me, don't try nothing. Don't you try no damn scene in front of her."

"Seems like you maybe even mentioned marriage, if I'm not mistaken."

"Seems like you may be some crazy kind of bitch, if I'm not mistaken," he says, mimicking her voice. He grabs her wrist when she reaches for her beer. She flinches: his hold is tight. But she looks a little intoxicated with it, her eyes dazed and fixed upon his grasp. He leans toward her and hisses into her ear, "Two goddamned stupid weeks we fucked around, what's that sound like to you, huh? A marriage proposal? Huh? Does it?" Sherri leans away from him, to get away from how hot and angry his breath and words feel at her ear, but his hand squeezes even tighter about her wrist and with his other hand he quickly reaches out and pulls her head back toward him. "You listening now? I told you before don't bother me again. Now you listening? We ain't getting married, we was never gonna get married, and if I was gonna marry anybody it sure as hell wouldn't be no whore like you," he says, turning her arm over, holding it down, exposing her palm and the soft, white skin of her forearm, "who keeps lists." Even in the smokey bluish light of the bar, thin scars, pale tracings of boy's names, are visible upon her skin. "My name on you somewhere?"

"No," Sherri lies, remembering the shard of broken mirror, and Bill's name, still raw, still bleeding lightly in red beads within its outlines, vivid upon her thigh's flesh among the thin ghosts of other boy's names. "I don't do that anymore."

"No? Not even for the man you were gonna marry? You run out of skin or something?"



"Let go," Sherri says, "let go of me."

"I keep trying to," he says, pushing her arm away from him, "but you don't let me."

Her skin is pale where his fingers just left, but red soon rushes to his imprint. Sherri straightens her back, raises her head, catches Nick's eyes and orders another schnapps and beer. She sees that the woman with Bill has been watching from the opposite corner, but she doesn't know for how long. Now she is walking back toward them. Sherri downs her shot, drinks her beer, and stares straight ahead.

Bill greets the woman and takes her into his arms and starts kissing her neck. She giggles loudly and tells him to stop that—that this is a public place, but Sherri can tell she doesn't mean it. The woman is watching Sherri. They decide to go home. They pay their bill and leave.

Sherri orders another schnapps, downs it, and looks around the room. Her eyes stop and widen on the couples. A group of men from across the bar greet her. She shakes her hair, smiles, and waves. The men fall back among themselves, talking and laughing. At the other end of the bar, he sees the pretty blonde woman who has been seeing Johnnie. She is talking with some friends, laughing, but whenever the door opens and someone comes in she turns to see who it is. She doesn't know yet that Johnnie left with Melissa. She's waiting for Johnnie.

Nick brings her another schnapps and points out who bought it for her. It is a man she had talked to the other week. An older man, who wears a baseball cap and has lost a couple of teeth. She waves to him, and he waves back, smiling. Sherri sees the colors, the blue and purple and red, which cover the skin of his arm and tries to remember the pattern of his tattoos. She remembers dragons and crosses and then a deep pinkish scar running close to the bone of his forearm. It had been an accident, a car accident, and he talked with her about wanting to find someone who would design another tattoo around the scar. So far, no one would touch it, fearing an infection. But he still wanted the tattoo. "What lady wants to see an ugly thing like this?" he had asked her, as he held his arm up to the light.

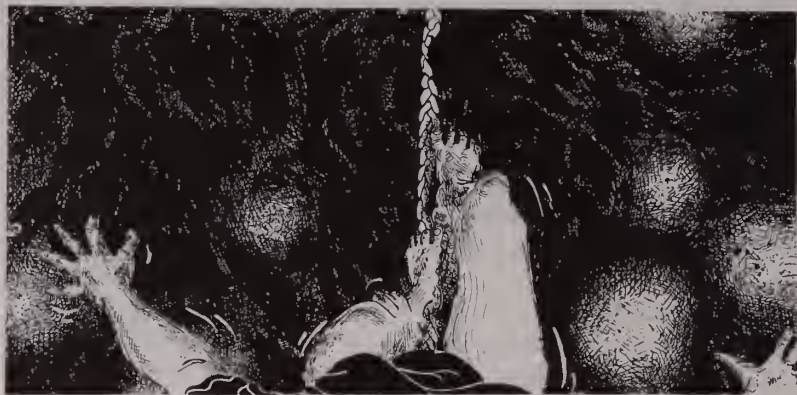
Sherri had never had an infection; she used hydrogen peroxide until the names healed. Maybe should get tattooed. Maybe roses or butterflies to cover the names.

Sherri finishes her beer and walks to the bathroom. On the wall, she sees that the long note she had written about how much she loved Bill, and how much he loved her has been scratched over with a pen. That woman with Bill must have done it. Sherri is taking a pen from her purse just as Johnnie's girlfriend walks in. Much is written about Johnnie on the white walls. How he is in bed, scratched out "I love Johnnie's", one that says "Johnnie would sell his own mother out for a dime."

When Johnnie's girlfriend comes out of the booth and begins to brush her hair, Sherri decides that someone should tell her the truth. That Johnnie's girlfriend watches her in the mirror and should know, needs to know, the truth. So Sherri tells her.

The girl looks angry, maybe even at Sherri, and hurt, and leaves without saying thanks. As Sherri rewrites her long note that the woman had scratched out, she thinks about Johnnie will have a lot of explaining to do to his girlfriend. Just like Bill when he calms down. He'll have to explain everything to Sherri.

—*Anne Black*



*Rachel Sengers*

## For Her Father

---

He swam her out to the deep water  
on his shoulders — she could not swim  
that far. He pulled like an oarsman,  
his strength unexpended, unexpendable,  
she holding on, gasping for air.

On his back she rode through briars,  
deep woods, brambles, carried almost  
safely over hills, a thorn  
in her eyelid. This once he showed  
her the pasture, the places where  
he said the fireflies in dippers-full  
had flown down the mountainsides  
in his childhood, coal-drab: and  
the dirt slide to the road  
down through the pumpkins.

Can you see across the river, he asked,  
to the telephone poles on the hill?  
Can you see the wires?  
Can you see the lines?  
Can you see that far?

—*Jane Dickerson*

## Night Travel

---

The car is so warm and dark  
around us that it disappears,  
we are above a town, simple in the dark.

Pale light bends from a window,  
cradles a shadow on a porch,  
a quiet swing with worn cushions.

Settled in the cushions a gentle history of no hurry,  
cotton smell of wet noons,  
balm of warm wood,

And sounds of early evenings,  
soft talk, creaks like crickets' breath,  
something humming night,

It is the car, you shift.  
If only we might settle on  
a porch five miles or so behind us.

—*Dian Elliott*



*Carl Bower*

## After the Tenth Elegy

---

In winter, at Purgatory Chasm  
mud sucks  
the resolution from a quick step  
and, like frozen mud, the secrets of our words  
stayed brittle,  
encased in ice and  
moving softly beneath

Against a wall of  
cold wind, I stood without sinking  
through crusts of ice  
on the salty mud, sucking coldly  
and softly at the shores  
of endurance.

That waiting always has an end —  
the flat embrace,  
the empty and now comfortable room —  
it ends in the taste  
of peas and pearl onions  
when I am back in the week  
of holding my breath,  
praying my walk down the street to the chasm  
not to hurt you,  
beyond my reach, unlisted, on the  
other side, somewhere, of a  
dark corner table  
piled with books, a clock, the phone.

Here, in this cat-bright morning  
the trees see themselves ripple,  
rippling green deep down into  
afternoon reflection.



Deep down, past the fish,  
waits the flat shine of dark.  
Unmoving.

A dark evergreen —  
submerged, forgotten, well-wasted.

—*Jeanne Griggs*



Life Stinks

*Robert Goldrick*

## Winter Sky

---

Nothing has changed.  
My father's eyes come to rest on my face.  
A winter sky overwhelms the landscape—  
A vastness only dreamt of.

Nothing has changed there.  
My father goes off to his church,  
Giving me a look as he goes out the door,  
Knowing he is wrong.  
I only know that there is no right or wrong  
In the solitude of a snowstorm  
Only whorls of water, frost, and ice  
In an otherwise calm place.

Here, nothing has changed.  
He sets aside his government,  
Religion, morality, ethics—  
Just which shirt to wear when—  
Not as an understanding of mystical oneness,  
Just a moment of pure humanity,  
Waking before the early morning  
And feeling the nothing  
There in the sheets, under the cold.

It all falls away, quietly screaming,  
The warmth within the steel of the winter sky.

—Joe Wenderoth



85 Pelsinski

Portrait of a Man

*Pete Pelsinski*

# Jonah

---

when a great wind came on the sea near the port of joppa  
a thousand dry furlongs from nineveh  
insolvent nineveh

jonah sat in the hold of the ship he had shipped on  
to escape the company penalties he had brought on

(but how does one know what one brings on?)

by not moving in on nineveh

as per the plan of jehovah

(but why must one always kowtow to a company plan?)

yes and so jonah

sat in the hold of that ship out of the great wind

and when sailors came nosing him out of the place he was hiding

and took him up on the deck and then cast him over

for being a jonah

awol from nineveh

and when the whale swept jonah up and swallowed him down

jonah sat in that whale with his soul full of fear

and his mind full of nineveh questions

such as

was it a company whale?

(for how does one ever know a company whale?)

of course he

had evidence of some weight

that the whale was a company whale

since it was not at all common for anyone to be swallowed down

by a true whale

yet

if one did not believe in whales that were company whales

one had to believe that the whale was a true whale

and could be expected to speak in a great deep voice

like a true whale

saying

jonah this whale  
liveth in water and knoweth no company  
verily  
this whale swalloweth  
what he swalloweth  
verily

yes so that possible speech of the whale did greatly please jonah  
since

if the truth be known  
jonah was feeling quite out of things down in the whale  
and even

if the truth be known  
heard the whale spouting yet further  
quoting lines from the wrong book of the bible  
saying

jonah  
if you should ask who it be  
who hath entered the springs of the sea  
and searched out its depths  
and drawn the whale from the deep  
with a hook  
then this whale would say to you  
jonah  
this is a whale that searches its own depths  
and this is a whale that has never been drawn from the deep  
with a hook

so that jonah  
feeling quite out of things down in the whale  
quizzed the whale closely as to his certainty  
that he rose from the depths of the sea to swallow down jonah  
by no company hook  
and in answer thereto did receive from the whale a verily  
a thundrous verily  
and decided that yes he must now be free of the company  
    (but does one know ever if one is free of the company?)  
and safe in the belly of one that could swim him to napoli  
    mayhap  
or majorca  
    mayhap

to majorca?

for oh at that juncture jonah  
was mightily pleased with the pleasing thought of majorca  
and spoke to the whale of the great charms of majorca  
with its old waterfront scenes and its deep bay at palma  
spoke so well  
that the whale began to move faster  
and faster  
and to leap through the sea with great surges of sinew that jonah  
could have wished gentler rather  
for he bounced like a ball up and down in the monster's interior  
and would have then prayed if prayer had not seemed unsuitable  
    rather



so that it was  
not even dusk on a lovely spring day in majorca  
which is three thousand furlongs from nineveh  
that jonah  
felt himself vomited upward and outward onto the  
sand of majorca  
    if that was the name of the land  
    (but how does one ever discover a name from the sand?)  
where he lay a long time on his back in the sun barely breathing  
with his soul full of fear and his mind full of nineveh questions  
such as  
    what could the company possibly want in majorca  
    from him who had not done at all what was wanted in nineveh

until he did look about him upon his majorca  
and upon the many good citizens of this majorca  
who came to him now on the sand full of laughter and leisure  
but briefly

only briefly

for now came a company voice  
    and it was without any doubt a company voice  
    (one always knows without doubt a company voice)  
telling jonah  
the company plan for majorca  
insolvent majorca

at which juncture jonah  
began to look for another ship he might ship on  
and to dream of a whale that was not a company whale  
to swallow him down and swim him far far away  
ever so far  
    (but can there ever be any place so very far?)

—Reed Whittemore



Frozen Life

*Charles Cohen*



Coretta King

*Kim Marie Peterson*

## Another Curved Moment

---

the clock winder pulls the hours  
a second hand joins in  
the circle of the moon is not quite complete  
a night slows down its entry to the morning  
is there ever stillness  
on the rim of glass that's opening line  
feeds into itself  
sweet liquid pours in my mouth  
I feel its journey through the shadow inside  
it becomes something else, part of me  
I don't need  
I sit on circles of wells to the earth  
invisible celebrations  
at another curved moment meeting itself

—Terri Harmon

## Contributors

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Kevin Sterling exists 100 year ahead of his time. • Ruta Aidis "Ego ne mange jamais fleisch ar rutabagas." • Pete Pelsinski would like to know: where is the head of the bust in the calvert office? • Sacha Jotisalikorn is employed but not as a filmmaker. • Jennie Alm is a graduate of the U of M with a degree in art. • Andrea Potter is a graduate student in library science. • Reed Whittemore, though he's not sure why, is the poet laureate of the state of Md. • Andrew Looney "In my spare time, I rule the universe." • Robert Goldrick "I want the one that I can't have and it's driving me mad." • Ethridge Knight's poem was printed with permission from *Born of a Woman New and Selected Poems*, Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1980. • Ann Black works in a hospital. • Charles Cohen can't make up his mind. • Carl Bower is a fun manic depressive. • Kim Marie Peterson has to sing, dance and paint, etc. • José Acosta's life-long goal has been to get something published in the Calvert Review. • John O'Dell wishes Calvert another successful year. • Dian Elliott graduated from UMCP in 1981 and takes classes when she has \$. • Rachel Sengers is trying to be a student of Japanese and Graphic Design as well as other things. • Valerie Russell works in non-print media. • Peggy Ramos wants to be an art therapist when she grows up.



**Ingredients: Study of a Lock on Neutral Paper; In the Backyard; Friends; Rocky; Vanity; The Final Trump; Oh Sylvia; Somewhere in France; The Empty City; Mushroom; For Malcolm, A Year Later; The Walk; Ying Yang; Hambrook's Snowworks; Oranges; Crickets; Bike; Close-up; Annunciation; Graffiti; For Her Father; Night Travel; After the Tenth Elegy; Life Stinks; Winter Sky; Portrait of a Man; Jonah; Frozen Life; Coretta King; Another Curved Moment; drawings (2); photographs (4)**